

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as shown below, in which changes are indicated by strikethrough and/or underscoring. Also, please add new claims 4-9. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended) Ultrasonic washing ~~equipment intended~~ apparatus for ultrasonic washing of an object to be washed by putting it into a washing tank containing deaerated cleaning liquid, said apparatus comprising:

a washing tank having side walls with ~~characterized in that~~ an inlet opening and an outlet opening formed therein for charging and discharging the object to be washed in and out of the washing tank ~~are provided in side walls of said washing tank,~~ wherein said inlet and outlet are provided with closable doors,

a shifting mechanism for shifting the position of an object to be washed, wherein said shifting mechanism is capable of charging the object to be washed into the washing tank from a side of the washing tank and discharging the object to be washed in the washing tank toward a side of the washing tank and is provided in the vicinities of said inlet and outlet,

a storage tank for temporarily storing cleaning liquid, and

~~said washing tank is connected with~~ a cleaning liquid charging/discharging flow control mechanism for controlling flow of cleaning liquid in said apparatus, wherein said flow control mechanism is operable to set ~~setting~~ a resting level of the cleaning liquid ~~not higher than~~ below the heights of the inlet and the outlet by shifting the cleaning liquid in the washing tank to a storage tank at the time of putting the object to be washed into the washing tank through the inlet and at the time of discharging the object ~~to be washed~~ in the washing tank through the outlet, and ~~for setting to set~~ a working level of the cleaning liquid ~~not lower than~~ above the heights of the inlet and the outlet by shifting the cleaning liquid ~~in~~ from the storage tank to the washing tank at the time of washing the object ~~to be washed~~.

2. (Currently Amended) The ultrasonic washing ~~equipment~~ apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising ~~characterized in that~~ a plurality of auxiliary tanks of substantially the same shape and configuration as the washing tank, wherein the auxiliary tanks are arranged along one line beside the inlet and outlet of said washing tank, wherein each of the washing tank and these

auxiliary tanks adjoining each other are disposed with their respective inlet and outlet openings arranged in mutually opposite positions, a common door is provided between each ~~couple~~ adjacent pair of these inlet and outlet openings, and wherein said apparatus is operable in a manner such that by opening or closing these doors said outlet and inlet openings are enabled to communicate with or are isolated ~~intercepted~~ from each other.

3. (Currently Amended) An ultrasonic washing method, ~~characterized in that it comprises~~ a comprising the steps of:

putting an object to be washed from a side of a washing tank through an inlet formed in a first side wall of the washing tank, with the level of the cleaning liquid in the washing tank being kept below-not higher than the height of the inlet in ~~[[a]]~~ the side wall of the washing tank; ~~and,~~ after

closing the inlet with a door,

letting deaerated cleaning liquid into the washing tank after the inlet door has been closed,

~~a step of subjecting the object to be washed to~~ ultrasonically washing the object within the washing tank, ~~and a step of~~

removing some of the cleaning liquid from the washing tank to bring the level thereof to a level below the height of an outlet formed in another side wall of the washing tank,

opening a door covering the outlet, and

discharging the washed object ~~to be washed~~ through the outlet ~~toward a side of the washing tank after the washing and after emptying the washing tank of the cleaning liquid to lower its level to not higher than the height of the outlet in a side wall of the washing tank and opening the door of the outlet.~~

4. (New) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising expandable packing material operatively associated with said inlet and with said outlet.

5. (New) The apparatus of claim 2, further comprising expandable packing material operatively associated with said inlet and with said outlet of each of said washing and auxiliary tanks.

6. (New) An ultrasonic washing apparatus, comprising:

a washing tank having side walls and a floor cooperating to define a washing chamber, said washing tank having an inlet opening formed in a first of said side walls and an outlet opening formed in a second of said side walls;

an inlet door operatively associated with

a shifting mechanism for shifting the position of an object to be washed, wherein said shifting mechanism is capable of charging the object to be washed into the washing tank from a side of the washing tank and discharging the object to be washed in the washing tank toward a side of the washing tank and is provided in the vicinities of said inlet and outlet,

a storage tank for temporarily storing cleaning liquid,

an ultrasonic signal generator, and

a cleaning liquid flow control mechanism for controlling flow of cleaning liquid in said apparatus, wherein said flow control mechanism is operable to set a resting level of the cleaning liquid by shifting cleaning liquid from the washing tank to a storage tank at the time of putting the object to be washed into the washing tank through the inlet and at the time of discharging the object in the washing tank through the outlet, and to set a working level of the cleaning liquid by shifting cleaning liquid from the storage tank to the washing tank in preparation for washing the object.

7. (New) The ultrasonic washing apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising:

a plurality of auxiliary tanks of substantially similar shape and size as the washing tank, each of the auxiliary tanks having an inlet and an outlet formed in opposed side walls thereof, wherein the auxiliary tanks are arranged substantially in line with the inlet and outlet of said washing tank, wherein each of the washing tank and these auxiliary tanks are disposed with their respective inlet and outlet arranged in mutually opposite positions, and

a common door provided between each adjacent pair of these inlet and outlet openings, wherein said apparatus is operable in a manner such that by opening these common doors, said adjacent outlet and inlet openings are enabled to communicate with each other, and by closing these common doors, said adjacent inlet and outlet openings are isolated from each other.

8. (New) The apparatus of claim 6, further comprising expandable and compressible packing material operatively associated with said inlet and with said outlet.

9. (New) The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising expandable and compressible packing material operatively associated with said inlet and with said outlet of each of said washing and auxiliary tanks.